

Fabio's days numbered?

SPORTS REPORTER

Italian coach Fabio Lopez's time at the Bangladesh helm is likely to come to an end within a few days as the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) high-ups are unhappy with the performance of the team in the ongoing invitational tournament in China.

The Italian replaced Dutch coach Lodewijk de Kruijff on September 10 and was appointed for a four-month contract, which should have run until the completion of December's SAFF Championship. However, Lopez is all but set to lose his job only 11 weeks into his work, the shortest ever tenure for any foreign coach of Bangladesh, according to hints provided from the BFF.

"We are not happy with the performance of the national team and the game's governing body is thinking deeply about him [Fabio Lopez]," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, adding that BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed and Tabith M Awal are concerned over the performance of the national team. The trio is supposed to hold a meeting today in this regard.

After taking over, Lopez ran some extreme experiments with the team, bringing positional changes to key players and tinkering with team combination. It is believed that these experiments have had an adverse impact on the players' performances.

Under the guidance of Lopez, Bangladesh lost three World Cup and Asian Cup qualifying matches against Kyrgyzstan (2-0), Tajikistan (5-0) and Australia (4-0) before conceding defeats against Myanmar (3-2) and Lijiang (2-1) in China.

Shohag said that a positive result against Hebei in today's match may give Fabio a lifeline but a source inside the federation has ruled out any possibility of keeping faith with the Italian.

The source informed that the game's governing body is thinking about appointing a coaching staff with the combination of a local coach and a foreign coach, who is most likely to be Gonzalo Sanchez Moreno. The Spaniard is already working as a BFF youth development coach.



Under-fire Italian coach Fabio Lopez (2nd from L) watches on as the Bangladesh players practice hitting the target during a training session in Yunnan, China yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Barca eye last 16

AFP, Madrid

Fresh from thrashing bitter rivals Real Madrid 4-0 at the weekend, Barcelona are aiming to seal their place in the last 16 of the Champions League when Roma visit the Camp Nou on Tuesday.

The European champions need just a point to reach the knockout stages for a 12th consecutive season and should be further boosted by the presence of Lionel Messi from the start for the first time in two months.

Messi made his return as a substitute from a knee ligament injury with Barca already leading 3-0 against Madrid and played his part in Luis Suarez's second goal of the evening to round off an historic night for the Catalans.

Suarez and Neymar have kept Barca afloat without Messi, scoring 24 of their last 28 goals in all competitions.

And with a win also sealing top spot in the group, Barca boss Luis Enrique is unlikely to rest any of his star front three even ahead of a busy few weeks in league, Cup and Champions League before they fly off to Japan for the World Club Cup at the end of December.

Whilst it would take a remarkable collapse for Barca not to qualify, Roma have it all to play for in their final two group games if they are to make the last 16 for the first time in five years.

The Italians sit second in the group, a point clear of Bayer Leverkusen and two ahead of BATE Borisov, who they host in their final game.

FIXTURES	
BATE Borisov (BLR)	v Bayer Leverkusen (GER)
Barcelona (ESP)	v Roma (ITA)
Arsenal (ENG)	v Dinamo Zagreb (CRO)
Bayern Munich (GER)	v Olympiakos (GRE)
Porto (POR)	v Dynamo Kiev (UKR)
Maccabi Tel Aviv (ISR)	v Chelsea (ENG)
Zenit St Petersburg (RUS)	v Valencia (ESP)
Lyon (FRA)	v Gent (BEL)

Roma got their campaign off to a great start by holding Barca to a 1-1 draw in the Italian capital thanks to Alessandro Florenzi's sensational strike from just over the halfway line.

And he believes they can produce another upset at the Camp Nou.

"It will certainly be difficult. They're the strongest side in the world, but we managed to produce something of an exploit against them at the Stadio Olimpico," Florenzi told Corriere dello Sport.

"We have to be fearless in Spain and determined to make the most of our chances."

In contrast to Barca's brilliance, Roma's inconsistent domestic campaign continued with a 2-2 draw in terrible weather conditions at Bologna on Saturday.

Rudi Garcia will also have to do without a number of attacking options as Gervinho and Mohamed Salah miss out through injury, whilst captain Francesco Totti hasn't featured since suffering a thigh injury two months ago.

'I was close to dying'

AFP, Paris

Suspended FIFA president Sepp Blatter revealed Sunday that he feared he was dying during a recent health scare.

The 79-year-old, who has been banned for 90 days as the ongoing probe into widespread corruption at football's world governing body, was hospitalised earlier this month suffering from stress.

"I was close to dying. I was between the angels who were singing and the devil who was lighting the fire, but it was the angels who sang," Blatter told Swiss broadcaster RTS in an interview to be aired on Wednesday.

"The pressure was enormous. At some stage the body just says 'no', 'enough is enough'. But if you are strong psychologically you can resist."

In September, Swiss prosecutors opened a criminal case against Blatter over mismanagement and a suspicious \$2 million payment made in 2011 to European football chief Michel Platini, who is also serving a 90-day ban.

But in excerpts from Wednesday's interview which were released to the media on Sunday, Blatter hailed Platini as an "honest man".

Booters up against it

SPORTS REPORTER

Winless Bangladesh will look for a consolation win in the Yunnan International Football Tournament when they take on Chinese provincial side, Hebei, in their last group match at the Mang Shi City Stadium today.

With top three teams from the group to advance to the knock-out stages, China's Lijiang and Hebei are in advantageous position as they have four points each while Myanmar have three points.

Bangladesh, who sit at the bottom of the group with no points from two matches, have an outside chance to advance to the knockout stages, depending on a win and the other result of the day going their way.

Bangladesh have no alternative but to beat Hebei with at least two-goal margin if they want to topple Myanmar, who also must lose against Lijiang. Both matches will get underway at same time.

Following a 0-4 home defeat against Australia, the charges of Fabio Lopez continued to show their dismal performance by losing against Myanmar 3-2 and Lijiang 2-1. And it is going to be tough ask for Bangladesh to beat Hebei, who played out a 2-2 draw with Lijiang and beat Myanmar 1-0.

Captain Mamunul Islam is hoping against hope about making it through.

"If we can play better than what we played against Lijiang, we can expect full three points as we are determined to put our best tomorrow [Tuesday]," Mamunul was said in an audio clip sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

Lopez admitted that he is still experimenting with the side to find the right combination for the upcoming SAFF Championship in December.

"Our tournament is going well even though the results are not positive. Don't worry about the results because the results are not showing the real picture and we are alert about it," Lopez said. "I am trying some new formations and new tactics for the SAFF tournament."

FIFA opens case against duo

Verdict due in December

AFP, Lausanne

The judgement arm of FIFA's ethics committee on Monday opened a case against the body's suspended president Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini, with a verdict in the corruption allegations surrounding both men due next month.

The panel of judges, known as the adjudicatory chamber, received the final report from the ethics committee's investigative branch on Saturday, which called for sanctions to be levelled against both men.

A guilty verdict would almost certainly crush UEFA president Platini's hopes of succeeding Blatter at the top of world football's governing body.

The investigative branch did not disclose the severity of the recommended sanctions, or the evidence collected, but both Blatter and Platini have been implicated in possible criminal conduct in a separate case launched by Swiss prosecutors.

In a statement, the adjudicatory chamber said it had "opened formal adjudicatory proceedings against Joseph S. Blatter and Michel Platini based on the final reports submitted by the investigatory chamber."

The chamber "intends to come to a decision in both cases during the month of December", the statement further said.

FIFA's ethics committee provisionally suspended both men -- once the two most powerful figures in world football -- for 90 days in October.

'Best-ever season'

AFP, London

Novak Djokovic hailed his historic fourth successive ATP Tour Finals title as a dream come true after the world number one finished his astonishing campaign by routing Roger Federer in Sunday's final.

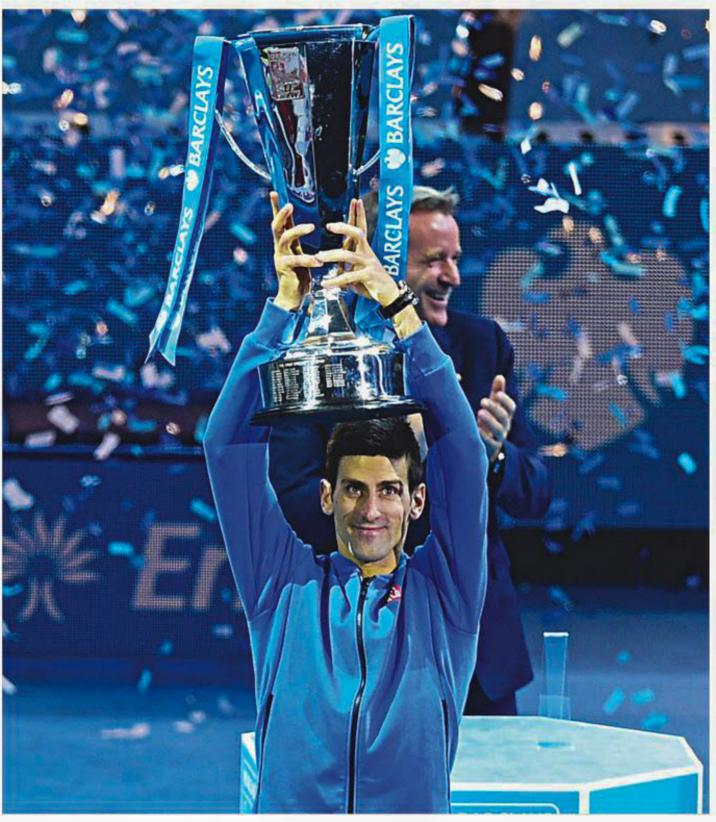
Djokovic is the first player to win the season-ending event four years in a row and his 6-3, 6-4 win over Federer was the perfect way to cap a year in which he won three Grand Slam crowns and eight other titles.

After hoisting the trophy, the 28-year-old Serb admitted he sometimes has to pinch himself to realise he is actually winning the tournaments he dreamed of playing in as a child.

"I am enjoying every moment on the court. I cherish every moment after dreaming of it as a kid," Djokovic said.

"Obviously I'm very proud, together with my team, for the achievements of the season.

"It could not have been a better finish. It's been a long season, but the best of my life."



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates with the ATP World Tour Finals trophy after winning the final against Switzerland's Roger Federer in London on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Inter go two pts clear

AFP, Milan



Goal-shy title contenders Inter Milan found their scoring boots in timely fashion on Sunday with a 4-0 win over Frosinone that fired Roberto Mancini's men two points clear in Serie A.

Inter's defensive game has been the bedrock of their push for a first title since their treble-winning season in 2010, although the Nerazzurri have also been conspicuously short of goals.

Inter had been given a huge incentive when overnight leaders Fiorentina were held to a 2-2 draw at home by Empoli, 24 hours after fellow title contenders Roma were held by the same scoreline at Bologna.

Those results left Napoli top of the pile on goal difference after Maurizio Sarri's men saw Lorenzo Insigne and Gonzalo Higuain strike in a 2-0 away win at Verona earlier on Sunday.

Jonathan Biabiany broke the deadlock on the half-hour after ramming the rebound from an Adem Ljajic strike in under the crossbar to hit his maiden league goal for the club, and almost immediately Inter began to play with swagger.

Argentinian striker Mauro Icardi doubled Inter's lead eight minutes after the restart after flicking Ljajic's short pass past Nicola Leali in the visitors' goal.

RESULTS	
Verona	0 - 2 Napoli (Insigne 67, Higuain 74)
Atalanta	0 - 1 Torino (Bovo 52)
Carpi (Gamberini 61-og)	1 - 2 Chievo (Inglese 8, Meggiolini 14)
Fiorentina (Kalinic 56, 61)	2 - 2 Empoli (Livaja 18, Buchel 27)
Genoa (Rincon 51, Pavoletti 90+5)	2 - 1 Sassuolo (Acerbi 90+4)
Lazio (Candrea 70-pen)	1 - 1 Palermo (Goldaniga 22)
Udinese (Badu 35)	1 - 0 Sampdoria
Inter Milan (Biabiany 29, Icardi 53)	4 - 0 Frosinone

he beat Leali from Stevan Jovetic's backheel after Ivan Perisic's decisive run.

The three-goal cushion prompted Mancini to replace Icardi with Marcelo Brozovic, and the Croatian seized the day when he burst downfield after linking up with Ljajic to fire past Leali.

Inter now have 30 points and a two-point cushion on Napoli and Fiorentina, with Roma a point further behind.

Earlier, Higuain hit his 10th goal of the campaign to take the lead in Serie A's scoring charts and fire Napoli one-point clear of Fiorentina after victory over struggling Verona.

But Fiorentina maintained their hopes in what continues to be a thrilling battle for this season's scudetto and were unlucky not to go two points clear after spurning a series of late chances at the Artemio Franchi.

Hazard has no rifts with Mourinho

AGENCIES, London

Eden Hazard has come under fire for some underwhelming performances and was benched by Jose Mourinho during Chelsea's woeful start to the campaign, but the Belgian says there is no problem with his manager and backed him to turn things around.

Mourinho has also had his share of criticism, and speculation about his future swirled with each poor result, but Hazard hopes Chelsea have turned a corner following Saturday's 1-0 win over Norwich City.

Mourinho had previously criticised Hazard's defensive work rate but the last season's player of the year said there was no rift with the Portuguese. "I don't have a problem with him," the 24-year-old told the club's website.

"He is the best manager, he is the best manager for Chelsea and we hope we can win a lot of trophies together."